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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 TEGUCIGALPA 000919

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PGOV KDEM HO

SUBJECT: TFHO1: AMBASSADOR'S MEETING WITH DE FACTO FM LOPEZ CONTRERAS

Classified By: Ambassador Hugo Llorens, reasons 1.4 (b & d)

11. (C) Summary: As per Department instructions, the Ambassador met with de facto regime Foreign Minister Carlos Lopez Contreras at the home of a mutual friend on September 11. The Ambassador discussed the visa revocations. Lopez confirmed he had received the notice on September 11 and understood the U.S. policy and legal reasons for our actions.

Both also shared their views on the San Jose Accord, the Ambassador urging the regime to sign right away as the best solution for the Honduran people. From the discussion, it remained unclear whether Lopez was able and willing to press Micheletti for a resolution or was just continuing Micheletti's time-burning tactics. Nonetheless, the two agreed to maintain a dialogue, within the framework of the no-contact policy. End summary.

12. (C) The Ambassador held a one-hour meeting with regime foreign minister Carlos Lopez Contreras on the evening of September 14 in the private home of communications industry executive and mutual friend Antonio Tavel.

Visa Revocations

13. (C) The Ambassador informed Lopez of the USG decision to revoke the visas of leading regime officials and supporters, including Lopez. He explained the revocations were intended to make clear that U.S. patience with the regime and its delaying tactics had run out, and that the United States was serious in its opposition to undemocratic acts such as the June coup. The Ambassador contextualized the revocation within the framework of the September 3 statement by the Department in favor of a rapid resolution of the crisis through the San Jose Accord and the plan to take additional measures to press for this goal.

14. (C) Lopez understood the revocations were not intended as personal, but rather as a reflection of U.S. policy toward Honduras at the moment. He said he did not take his own visa revocation personally, but lamented its timing. He pointed to his public statement earlier that day that he felt it was unfortunate the revocations happened before he was able to carry out his scheduled meetings with U.S. Senators and Members of Congress, including Senator Lugar. Lopez added that he would be interested in meeting with the Secretary at some point to discuss the crisis and the de facto regime's

position. The Ambassador did not respond to this request. Lopez said he had advised Micheletti not to take any retaliatory action against U.S. diplomats or the Embassy, because it would be counterproductive to regime interests. He explained retaliation had been advocated by other Micheletti advisors, but did not give details about those measures. (Note: Based on conversations with Embassy contacts, we speculate possible retaliation measures would have been expulsion of the Ambassador and/or Consul General, non-recognition of any new U.S. credentials, and/or refusing re-entry of U.S. diplomats who exited the country. To date, none of these actions has been taken. End note.)

San Jose Accord

15. (C) The Ambassador then laid out in detail U.S. policy toward Honduras and the political crisis, making the case for the San Jose Accord, arguing that the accord was a solution that restores the constitutional order, while still taking into account the concerns of the anti-Zelaya movement. He noted that the Accord's 12 points were developed chiefly based on inputs from the Micheletti negotiating team to address their concerns about Zelaya. The Ambassador explained that the accord took into account all the key issues of both sides, in particular no constituent assembly, early elections (no longer practical) to speed the "lame duck" status of the incumbent, and the establishment of a verification commission to fully enforce adherence to the accord, while at the same time restoring the institution of the presidency and providing for a political amnesty and

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temporary moratorium on criminal prosecution of all parties to allow the country to heal.

16. (C) The accord was intended -- as was U.S. policy regarding Honduras -- to prevent creating any "losers" in the end, but rather to restore peace and allow for healing among the Honduran people and a smooth transition to a democratically-elected president. The Ambassador added that if the accord were reached before elections, the inauguration of the next president in January 2010 was likely to be the most-attended presidential inauguration in the history of Latin America. The Ambassador also pointed out that the accord, contrary to the regime's political rhetoric, was designed to counter the undemocratic efforts of Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, who probably secretly hoped Zelaya would not return. He said Chavez was interested in Zelaya becoming a permanent victim, both to ensure the failure of the Obama administration's Latin America policy and to prove the uselessness of the OAS and the Inter-American system.

17. (C) Lopez expressed his appreciation for the opportunity to hear the U.S. point of view from the Ambassador, and said he understood that U.S. support for the Accord was aimed at solving the political crisis. He noted that a significant portion of the Honduran public still were adamantly opposed to Zelaya's return, and were not ready to accept amnesty or a moratorium on prosecution. He added that the 12-point accord was the result of input from a variety of Hondurans, alluding to former president Carlos Flores' influence. He also said that while the accord did reflect the counterproposals of the Micheletti team following the first version, he and the team had told Costa Rican President Oscar Arias at the time they would need to convince civil society and key regime supporters to accept it. Lopez added that elements of the accord still were not quite where they needed to be in order for it to be accepted by those opposed to Zelaya, in particular pointing to a visceral rejection of the idea of Zelaya's return and the need for greater depth in the areas of the amnesty and moratorium on criminal prosecution. (Note: The Micheletti regime and its supporters, particularly media owners, have made no effort to prepare the public for these prospects, but rather have worked energetically toward

the contrary, framing public discourse about the accord as a defeat for democratic principals and constitutionality in the face of foreign pressure. End note)

¶18. (C) Lopez hinted that he had gone to Micheletti to say he needed to consider the prospect of Zelaya's return, but noted that he was not a member of Micheletti's inner circle. Lopez said that before being named the regime's foreign minister, he had not known Micheletti personally. (Note: Lopez is the regime's second foreign minister, replacing Enrique Ortez Colindres, of racist infamy. End note.) He said he had recently sent President Arias and Costa Rican Foreign Minister Bruno Stagno a note explaining where the regime stood on the Accord, seeking clarification on amnesty, and offering some suggestions on how to manage Zelaya's return. He said he also pointed out in the note that it was too late to move up the election date. Lopez presented a copy of the note to the Ambassador, who responded that he was already aware of the note and stressed that time had run out on the prospect of making significant revisions to the accord. He said Micheletti needed to sign now, and then could hammer out issues of concern in further detail in the week following.

¶19. (C) On a personal note, Lopez commented on the actions of Micheletti's negotiating team member Arturo Corrales, saying that Corrales had gotten out ahead of his mandate in proposing a third option while preparing for the OAS foreign ministers' visit. He said Corrales' actions had created an impression that the regime had been insincere in its negotiations before the visit. The Ambassador acknowledged that many people had been troubled because Corrales had been perceived as maneuvering and manipulating on behalf of the regime, but the Ambassador said he felt it may have been more a case of Corrales attempting to make the most of an impossible situation. The meeting concluded with both Lopez and the Ambassador agreeing that it was important to remain in dialogue as much as possible, within the constraints of the U.S. non-contact policy.

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¶10. (C) Comment: Lopez is a calm, intelligent, and professional diplomat with over 30 years experience. He served as Foreign Minister under the Flores administration, and knows President Arias from the 1980's when the two locked horns during the Esquipulas process. It appeared that Lopez was in part feeling out the Ambassador in this meeting to detect whether the regime had any potential "wiggle room" regarding the Accord. The Ambassador took a strong position to convey that there was none. Lopez did not raise the theme of elections as a solution, and the discussion of elections was limited to the Ambassador's mention of it with regard to the Department's September 3 statement. We intend to continue low-key dialogue with Lopez within the confines of the non-contact policy in the hope that he will prove to be an advocate for the San Jose Accord, and is not simply playing Micheletti's game of running out the clock.

LLORENS